

London, Oct. 25, 1721.

# PROPOSALS FOR Printing by Subscription,

In Two Volumes in Octavo,  
The following Miscellaneous Tracts,  
Written by Mr. JOHN DENNIS.

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- II. *Rinaldo and Armida*, a Tragedy.
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Letters, never before Printed, on several Subjects.

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- II. Defence of Mr. Wycherley's Ridiculous Characters in the Country Wife, and the Plain Dealer.
- III. On the present State of *Parvaaffus*.
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- VIII. Several Familiar Letters.
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viz. 1. From the late Mr. Prior. 2. From the  
late Walter Moyle, Esq;. 3. From the late Mr.  
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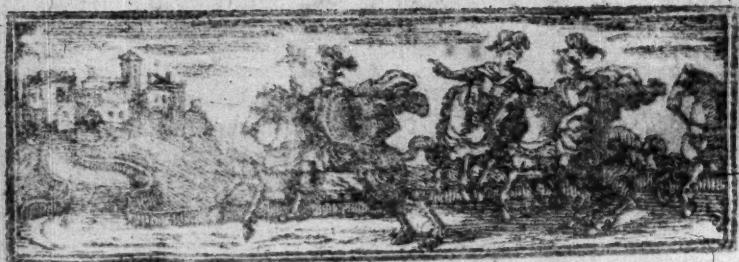
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# LETTER I

## PARADISO ALIONIS



... to poor Peter -  
... a number of us  
make some opposition  
as on the part of  
Peter to William Queen I  
desirous to give them  
to you pecuniary aid  
know the Turn of  
some Fugitives which I have  
done nothing to assist say pecuniary I have do-  
ne you know Peter's desire to be relieved  
of the loss of those with whom I  
have a close connection - and now the  
same



LETTER I.

# OBSERVATIONS ON THE PARADISE LOST *of MILTON.*

To Dr. S—

SIR,



Was no sooner determin'd within my self to make some Observations on the *Paradise Lost of Milton*, than I resolv'd to direct them to you, because you know the Truth of some Facts which I shall

be oblig'd to relate, and because I have observ'd in you a better Taste of the greater Poetry, than in most of those with whom I have lately convers'd; which having pre-

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mis'd,

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mis'd, I shall without more Preamble enter upon the Subject of which I design to treat.

I believe, Sir, that I have told you more than once, that I, who have all my Lifetime had the highest Esteem for the great Genius's of the Ancients, and especially for *Homer* and *Virgil*, and who admire them now more than ever, have yet for these last Thirty Years admir'd *Milton* above them all for one thing, and that is for having carried away the Prize of Sublimity from both Ancients and Moderns: And in most of the Treatises which I have publish'd for Thirty Years, even in those in which I have been unaptly engag'd to detect and to blame the Errors of some of my Contemporaries, I have not been able to forbear pointing at several of the matchless Beauties of *Milton*. In the *Remarks on Prince Arthur*, I cited at large the sublime Description of *Satan* in the first Book of that Poem; and the Speech of that fallen Arch-Angel in the fourth, which begins with that noble Apostrophe to the Sun.

In the *Advancement and Reformation of modern Poetry*, which was publish'd in 1700, I shew'd the vast Advantage which *Milton* had over *Ovid*, and ev'n *Virgil* himself, in his Description of Chaos and the Creation. In the *Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, which Book was publish'd in 1704, you know very well, Sir, that I cited at large the Description

Description of the Descent of *Raphael* in the fifth Book, and the glorious Hymn to the Creator in the same Book, and likewise the divine Colloquy between God and *Adam* in the eighth Book.

Some Persons, who long since the Publication of the foremention'd Treatises began to write Notes on the *Paradise Lost*, have made particular mention of the same Beauties which I had mark'd out before, without making any mention of me. Tho' you know very well, Sir, that I can bring unquestionable Proof that those Persons had read the foremention'd Treatises, and read them with Applause; but I should not be in the least concern'd at the treating me so unfairly and ungenerously, if they had done Justice to *Milton*, thro' the Course of their Criticisms, of which they have grossly fail'd in the following Respects.

I. They have not allow'd that *Milton* in the Sublimity of his Thoughts surpass'd both Ancients and Moderns.

II. In their Observations which they have made on the *Paradise Lost*, they have insisted too much upon things in which *Milton* has Equals, instead of dwelling intirely on that Sublimity which is his distinguishing and Characteristick Quality, and which sets him above Mankind.

III. In citing Passages from him which are truly sublime, they have often fail'd of set-

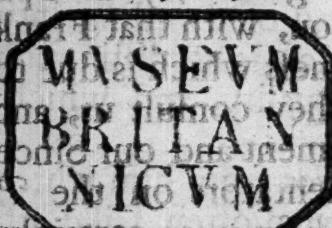
ting his Sublimity in a true Light, and of shewing it to all its Advantage.

IV. In those Passages whose Sublimity they have set in a true Light, they have not observ'd, to the Honour of *Milton*, and our Country, that the Thoughts and Images are Original, and the genuine Offspring of *Milton's* transcendent Genius.

V. They have not shewn how *Milton's* Sublimity is distinguish'd from that of all other Poets in this Respect, that where he has excell'd all other Poets in what he has express't, he has left ten times more to be understood than what he has express't, which is the surest and noblest Mark, and the most transporting Effect of Sublimity.

To shew that they who have writ Observations on the *Paradise Lost*, have not done Justice to *Milton*, with regard to the five foremention'd Articles, is the Design and Subject of the Letters I intend to send you, which shall rather be frequent than long, my Design being to amuse and entertain you, and not to fatigue and tire you.

*Decem*, 9, 1721. New Year's Day, 1722.  
 M<sup>rs</sup> SEV<sup>m</sup> I am, &c.  
 BRITAN<sup>m</sup> NIC<sup>m</sup> LET-



~~To his singular art good  
Sapient and wise. To his  
Advantages  
- vi. in those Pictures worth  
the price paid for them, and  
no Comparison to the Honour of Milton,  
and the Pictures and  
of Countless others in the  
greatest Masterpieces of  
the English School.~~

## LETTER II.

### *Observations on the PARADISE LOST of MILTON.*

To Dr. S —

SIR,

I Affirmed in my last that the Persons who had writ Comments upon the *Paradise Lost* of Milton, had not done Justice to the great Author in several Respects which are there particulariz'd. And,

First and principally in this, that they have not acknowledg'd that he has born away the Prize of Sublimity from both Ancients and Moderns.

What I asserted in my former, I shall endeavour to prove in this, but on this Condition, that you will give me your Opinion of what I write to you, with that Frankness and that Unreservednes which is due to our Friends, whenever they consult us, and depend upon our Judgment and our Sincerity.

Of all the Commentators on the *Paradise Lost*, Mr. Addison was certainly the most

most ingenious, if he was not the most learned, but he has not given *Milton* his full Due, either thro' want of Discernment, or want of Impartiality. In the 17th Page of the small Edition of his Notes upon the *Paradise Lost*, he has these Words of the Author:

*Milton's chief Talent, and indeed his distinguishing Excellence, lies in the Sublimity of his Thoughts. There are others of the Moderns who rival him in every other part of Poetry; but in the Greatness of his Sentiments he triumphs over all the Poets both Moderns and Ancients, Homer only excepted.*

But as when a Man departs from Truth, which is the only bond of Union and Agreement, both of our Sentiments with those of others, and of our Sentiments with themselves, he is ready immediately to differ from, and to grow inconsistent with himself; Mr. Addison, who expressly here either equals or prefers *Homer* for the Greatness of his Sentiments before *Milton*, contradicts himself at least no less than twice in the Course of his Observations: for says he, in the 7th Page of the foreaid Edition, *There is an indisputable and unquestion'd Magnificence in every part of Paradise Lost, and indeed a much greater than could have been form'd upon any Pagan System. Now if there is a greater Magnificence in every Part of Milton's Poem, there is by Consequence a greater*

greater Sublimity than there is in the *Iliad*,  
which was form'd upon a Pagan System.

Again in the 92d Page of the foresaid Edition, Mr. Addison, speaking of the Excellence of Milton's Performance in the Sixth Book of his Poem, delivers himself thus:

*Milton's Genius, which was so great in it self, and so strengthned by all the helps of Learning, appears in this Book every way equal to his Subject, which is the most sublime that could enter into the Thoughts of a Poet.*

Now, Sir, if Milton's Subject is the most sublime that could enter into the Thoughts of a Poet, and his Genius is every way equal to his Subject; it follows that Milton is more exalted than any Poet who has not a Subject so elevated, and consequently than Homer, or any other Poet ancient or modern.

But as in the 91st Page of the foresaid Comment, Mr. Addison takes a great deal of Pains to shew the Greatness of one particular Passage of Homer, and to describe it, after Longinus, in all those chosen Circumstances, which may make it appear to be noble and exalted, which Pains he has not taken with any other Passage, we may reasonably conclude that he believ'd this to be the most lofty of any that are in the Works of Homer, as indeed it really is: Now as there is a Passage in the 6th Book of *Paradise Lost*, which was produced upon a parallel

parallel Occasion, let us see if we cannot find by comparing them, for the Honour of our Country, that the Passage of our Briton is as much superior to that of the Grecian, as the Angels of the one are more potent than the other's Gods, or as the Empyrean Heaven is more exalted than *Ossa*, *Pelion* or *Olympus*. In order to this, Sir, give me leave to lay before you the Words which Mr. Addison makes use of to set forth the masterly Strokes of *Homer*. After he has told us, that there is no question, but that *Milton* had heated his Imagination with the Fight of the Gods in *Homer*, before he enter'd upon the Engagement of the Angels (of which, by the way, I do not believe one Syllable; I would sooner believe the greatest Absurdities of the *Alcoran*) he is pleas'd to add what follows:

*Homer* where gives us a Scene of Men, Heroes, and Gods, mix'd together in Battle. Mars animates the contending Armies, and lifts up his Voice in such a manner, that it is heard distinctly amidst all the Shouts and Confusion of the fight. Jupiter at the same time thunders over their Heads, while Neptune raises such a Tempest, that the whole Field of Battle, and all the Tops of the Mountains shake about them. The Poet tells us, that *Pluto* himself, whose Habitation was in the very Center of the Earth, was

so affrighted at the Shock, that he leapt from his Throne. Homer afterwards describes Vulcan as pouring down a Stormboſt Fire upon the River Xanthus, and Minerva as throwing a Rock at Mars, who he vext us cover'd seven Acres in his fall.

With these imaginary no plus ultra's had Mr. Addison so fill'd his Capacity, that when ten thousand greater Beauties are before his Eyes, he stops short of them, and never in the least discerns them, as you will see immediately; for thus he goes on:

*As Homer has introduc'd into his Battle of the Gods every thing that is great and terrible in Nature, Milton has fill'd his Fight of good and bad Angels with all the like Circumstances of Horror. The Sound of Armies, the Rattling of brazen Chariots, the hurling of Rocks and Mountains, the Earthquake, the Fire, the Thunder, are all of them employ'd to lift up the Reader's Imagination, and give him a suitable Idea of so great an Action. With what Art doth the Poet represent the whole Body of the Earth trembling, even before it was created.*

Thus with this very pretty trifling Remark does Mr. Addison stop short, within the very touch of one of the vastest and the sublimest Beauties that ever was inspir'd by the God of Verse, or by Milton's Godlike Genius; when the very next Lines, the very next Words, strike and astonish us with such

wonderful Ideas, as are able to lift up the Reader's Imagination to a thousand times a greater Height than either the Shout of Armies, the Rattling of brazen Chariots, the hurling of Rocks and Mountains, the Earthquake, the Fire, or the Thunder. But that these Beauties may be seen in all their Lustre, and in all their Glory, give me leave to set the whole Passage before you.

*The Arch-Angel's Trumpet through the vast  
of Heav'n  
Resounded, and the faithful Armies rang  
Hosanna to the Highest: nor stood at glaze  
The adverse Legions, nor less hideous join'd  
The horrid Shock now storming Fury rose  
And Clamour such as heard in Heav'n till now  
Was never, Arms on Armour clashing bray'd  
Horrible Discord, and the madding Wheels  
Of brazen Chariots rag'd; Dire was the  
Noise*

*Of Conflict; over head the dismal Hiss  
Of fiery Darts in flaming Vollys flew,  
And flying vaulted either Hoff with Fire.  
So under fiery Cope together ruff'd  
Both Battles main, with ruinous Assault  
And inextinguishable Rage; all Heav'n  
Resounded, and had Earth been then, all  
Earth*

*Had to her Center shook: What Wonder?  
when*

*Millions of fierce encountring Angels fought  
On*

*On either side, the least of whom could wield  
These Elements, and arm him with the force  
Of all their Regions.*

But now, Sir, if Millions of fierce encoutring Angels fought on either Side, and the very least, the very weakest of so many Millions had Power to rend this Globe of Earth and Ocean from its Axle, and whirl it with its dependent Atmosphere thro' the Æthereal Regions, what must be the unutterable, the inconceivable Effect of so many Millions furiously contending against each other, and each of them exerting all his might for Victory? When

---

*Each on himself relied,  
As only on his Arm the Moment lay  
Of Victory.*

These are amazing, these are astonishing Ideas, worthy of the great Original Fight, the Battle of the Empyrean.

But now, Sir, if the least, if the weakest of so many Millions as fought on either Side, had Strength to remove this Globe of Earth with its dependent Elements, what could not the greatest of them, what could not Lucifer, what could not the Prince of the Arch-angels, Michael's next to Almighty Arm do? The following Lines, and our own Reflections on them, may a little help to inform us.

Long time in even Sæt the battle went  
 The Battle hung, till Satan, who that Day  
 Prodigious Power had shewn, and met in  
 Arms.

No Equal, ranging through the dire Attack  
 Of fighting Seraphim confus'd, at length  
 Saw where the Sword of Michael smote and  
 fell'd.

Squadrons at once,

But now, Sir, of whom were these Squadrons? Why,

Squadrons of those the least of whom could  
 wield.

These Elements, and arm him with the Force  
 Of all their Regions.

What must the Power of that Arch-angel  
 be, who with one Stroke of his Sword could  
 fell whole Squadrons of those,

The least of whom could wield these Elements,  
 And arm him with the Force of all their  
 Regions?

But let us proceed to the Combat of the  
 two Arch-angels, and we shall see something  
 more in a Passage that is wonderfully sub-  
 lime, and worthy the Mouth of the Angel  
 who relates it.

They

They ended Parle, and both address for Fight  
 Unspeakable; for who, tho' with the Tongue  
 Of Angels, can relate, or to what Things  
 Liken on Earth conspicuous, that may lift  
 Human Imagination to such height  
 Of Godlike Power. For likest Gods they seem'd,  
 Stood they or mov'd, in Stature, Motion,  
 Arms

Fit to decide the Empire of great Heavn.  
 Now wav'd their fiery Swords, and in the Air  
 Made horrid Circles; two broad Suns their  
 Shields

Blaz'd opposite, while Expectation flood  
 In horror; from each Hand with speed re-  
 tir'd

Where erst was thickest Fight, th' Angelick  
 Throng,

And left large Field, unsafe within the Wind  
 Of such Commotion.

Now who were these that retir'd with so  
 much Speed, and could not bear the very  
 Wind of the Weapons of the two Arch-  
 angles, and were threatened with Destruction  
 by their very Motion? Why, this Angelick  
 Throng were the same whom the Angel  
 mention'd above;

The least of whom could wield these Elements,  
 And arm him with the Force of all their  
 Regions.

So that we find, computing by just Proportion, that *Michael* the Prince of the Arch-angels, or *Lucifer* before his Fall, had Might enough to confound and destroy in a Moment the whole Dominion of the Sun, to crush all the Planetary World depending on him, and whirling them through the immense Regions of the Sky, to scatter and disperse them in empty infinite Space. These, Sir, are vast, these are prodigious Conceptions; and the Poet was so sensible that his Genius, though mighty as ever was that of a Mortal, and seeming to be inspir'd by that very Angel whom he introduces relating this, he was so sensible that his Genius sunk under his vast Conceptions, that when he compares the two contending Arch-angels to two Planetary Worlds broke loose, and crushing and confounding each other, and sees this Image so vast in itself, and yet so little answering to his waster Idea, he finds himself oblig'd to express himself as follows.

~~From such a consideration of all these difficulties~~  
~~From each hand with speed retir'd~~  
~~Where first was thickest Fight, the Angelick~~  
~~Throng,~~  
~~And left large Field, unsafe within the Wind~~  
~~Of such Commotion, such as to set forth~~  
~~Great Things by small, if Nature's Concord~~  
~~broke,~~  
~~And War among the Constellations sprung,~~  
~~Two Planets rushing with Aspect malign~~

Of

Of fiercest Opposition in mid Sky  
Should combat, and their jarring Spheres  
confound.

The Conflict of two Worlds crushing  
and confounding each other, appear'd but  
trivial and light to him, to express his Idea  
of the Combat of the two Arch-angels; and  
therefore he says, that he's oblig'd to set  
forth Great things by Small.

What immediately follows accounts for  
all this, and is transcendently Sublime.

Together both with next to Almighty Arm  
Apprest, imminent, one Stroke they aim'd,  
That might determine, and not need repeat,  
As not of Power at once.

That Expression with next to Almighty  
Arm, includes more than the Thoughts of  
the greatest Reader can ever comprehend;  
which recalls to my Remembrance, that noble,  
that wonderful Image, which the Poet  
gives of *Satan*, in the second Book of this  
exalted Poem.

The Stygian Council thus diffolv'd, and forth  
In order came the grand infernal Peers,  
Midst came their mighty Paramount, and  
seem'd alone th' Antagonist of Heav'n.

I defy any one to name any thing so sublime in *Homer*, as the latter End of this Passage above.

I am sensible, that this Letter runs into too great a Length, and 'tis high time to conclude it. I have endeavour'd to prove in it, that there is a Sublimity in *Milton's* Battle of Angels, infinitely superior to that which is in the Battle of *Homer's* Gods and Heroes in the twentieth Iliad: And as I have set sublime Beauties before you, of which neither Mr. *Addison*, nor my Lord *Roscommon*, have taken the least Notice, so in my next I shall make an Objection which has not been yet made. If I have any where pass'd the Bounds of the Epistolary or the Didactic Stile, you will have the Goodness to consider, that it was next to impossible to resist the violent Emotions which the Greatness of the Subject rais'd in me.

*I am, &c.*

LETTER

I deny you one to same you think to imp-  
tune in Homer, as the writer had of this Po-  
em, upon the same.

I am sensible, that this letter will come into  
too great a Favour, and therefore decline con-  
clude it. I have endeavoured to bring in as

easy where is Supplement in Vixion, a Picture of

*A long Passage of Paradise Lost*

in the Picture of Hell, as of Heavens

in the invention itself. And as I have let

so much Pictures before you, of whom the

best Mr. Dryden, in his *Concordance*,

I have taken the last, of all my next

I shall make an Observation which has not yet

been made. If I have any where best fit the

*Airs* in my last Endeavour'd to shew

Beauties in *Milton*, which no one had

taken Notice of before me, and greater Beau-  
ties than any which I believe had been taken

Notice of: I shall in this lay before you an

Objection, which no one that I know of

has made against those very Machines of

*Milton*, from the Force and Power of which

those sublime Beauties were drawn.

Most of the Machines then in *Paradise*  
*Lost*, have the appearance of something that  
is inconsistent and contradictory, for in them  
the Poet seems to confound Body and  
Mind, Spirit and Matter. At the latter End  
of the first Book we find this Passage,

*Thus incorporeal Spirits to smallest Forms*  
*Rede their Shapes immense.*

D Now

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Now Form and Shape suppose Extension,  
and Extension implies Matter. Besides, he  
has given them solid Arms and Armour,  
which can be employ'd by Body only, as  
Helmet, Spear, Shield, Sword, and has ihe wh  
both his good and his bad Angels Cap-a-pee  
in Armour. *To which all the Answer that can reasonably be made is, That both the good and the bad Angels, though in themselves pure Spirits and uncompounded Essences, yet on occasion, either voluntarily assume Bodies, or by superior Power and divine Command are oblig'd to assume them.* And that this was Milton's Notion of the thing, the following Verses in the first Book incline us to believe. *Spinis, when they please,*  
*Can either Sex assume, or both; so soft*  
*And uncompounded is their Essence pure,*  
*Not ty'd or manacled with Joint or Limb,*  
*Nor founded on the brittle Strength of Bones,*  
*Like cumb'rous Flesh; but in what Shapes*  
*they please,*  
*Dilated or condens'd, bright or obscure,*  
*Can execute their airy Purposes,*  
*And works of Love or Enmity fulfill.*

This is the best Answer I can give to the Objection I have made; and if you are not satisfy'd with it, I desire you would send me your own; for it concerns us to invalidate the

the most important Objection that can be made to the greatest of our *English Poets*, and perhaps against most of the *Machines* which are employ'd in the Christian Poetry. And here let me deplore one Unhappiness that attends our modern Poetry. For tho' the Machines with which the Christian Religion supplies us, must be allow'd to be greater, more wonderful, and more terrible, than any which the Pagan Religion affords us, they are less delightful: For that which comes nearest to humane Nature, must in Poetry be most delightful to it; but the Gods and Goddesses of the *Grecian* and *Roman Poetry*, being feign'd to have manifest Bodies, and apparent humane Shapes, and the agreeable Distinction of Sexes, come incomparably nearer to humane Nature, than the Machines of the Christian Poetry, and are therefore more delightful to it; and likewise for the following Reason, because we have, beyond all Comparison, more clear and distinct Ideas of them, than we have of the Christian Machines.

Jan. 24. 172 $\frac{1}{2}$ . TUES : DECEMBER 172 $\frac{1}{2}$

I am Yours &c.

POST SCRIPIT.

I Am sorry, that while I was writing what is above, it was not in my Thoughts to acquaint you, that there seems to me to be a vast Difference between some of the Machines of Milton and others, with regard to their Justness. When the good Angels, &c. are own to fit it according to the rules of Justice, & of In

gels, first *Raphael*, and afterwards *Michael*, were feign'd by the Poet to be commanded by God to appear before our first Parents, it was very justly suppos'd by him that they assum'd Bodies, and that they appear'd to them in some Form that came near to humane Shape, because it is impossible that any thing but Body can be the true Object of humane Sight, and because every Body that appears, must appear in some certain Shape or Form; and *Milton* might know of no Shape that had more Dignity than the humane. But with all the Veneration that I have for this great Poet, I cannot help thinking, that when in the first and second Books of his Poem, which yet are transcendently Sublime, he describes the fall'n Angels in Shapes that come near to humane, and describes them as having three of the five Animal Senses, viz. seeing, hearing and feeling; when he paints them after this manner, communing only one with another in their own infernal Regions, immediately after their Fall; and yet acquaints us at the same time that they are incorporeal Beings, and pure and uncompounded Essences; methinks his Paintings, as to that Point, are not so easily to be justified. I know indeed very well, that *Copley* in the first Book of his *Draudeus*, and *Tasso* in the fourth Canto of his *Giuersalemme*, have describ'd those fall'n Angels as having Bodies, and something like humane Shapes, though on Occasions on which they commune only with one another in their own infernal Regions. But then, as neither *Copley* nor *Tasso* have formally and expressly declar'd, as *Milton* has expressly and formally done, that those evil Spirits are incorporeal Beings, and pure and uncompounded Essences; they leave the Reader's Imagination free to fancy, that those fall'n Angels have Bodies; and as they assert no Notions that may be taken to be inconsistent, they have avoided the giving their Readers the occasion of believing, that there is in their Descriptions of those fall'n Angels any real Contradiction, or the trouble of shewing, that what is thought to be a real Contradiction, has but the false Appearance of one.

**A Defence of Mr. Wychenley's Characters in the Plain-dealer.**

To William Congreve, Esq;

SIR,

I have lately heard, with some Indignation, that there are Persons who arraign the ridiculous Characters of our late Friend Mr. Wychenley, for being forsooth too witty; moved, I suppose, by the wise Apprehension that they may be of dangerous Example, and spread the Contagion of Wit in this Witty and Politick Age, an Age so very witty, and so very Politick, that it is always like to be an undetermined Question, whether our Wit has the Advantage of our Politicks, or our Politicks of our Wit.

As soon as I heard of this Accusation, I resolved to write a Defence of Mr. Wycherley, and to direct this Defence to you, for the following Reasons: Because you had a true Esteem for Mr. Wycherley's Merit, as well as had your humble Servant; Because you are allow'd by all to be an undoubted Judge of the Matter in debate; and Because an express Vindication of Mr. Wycherley's ridiculous Characters, is an implicate one of some of your own.

The

The foremention'd Persons pretend that Mr. Wycherley is included in the following Censure of the late Duke of Buckingham, and a Passage in Mr. Dryden's Preface to his Translation of Fresnoy.

Another Fault which often doth befall,  
Is when the Wit of some great Poet shall  
So overflows, that is he none at all.  
That ev'n his Fools speak Sense as if posseſt,  
And each by Inspiration breaks his Jeſt.  
If once the Jufiness of each Part be lost,  
Well may we laugh, but at the Poet's Caſt.

Now, Sir, I cannot believe the late Duke of Buckingham so much as thought of Mr. Wycherley in this severe Censure, not only because the Censure is not true with regard to Mr. Wycherley, as shall be prov'd below, but because the Duke, who knew the Value of Money as much as another would never have done for generous a thing by our deceas'd Friend, as the lending him 500*l.* upon his own single Bond, during his Father's Lifetime, if he had look'd upon Mr. Wycherley as a ridiculous Author; and he must have look'd upon him as such, if he had believ'd that he did not preserve the Jufiness of his Characters.

If once the Jufiness of each Part be lost,  
Well may we laugh, but at the Poet's Caſt.

But

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But let us come to the Passage in Mr Dryden's Preface to *Fresnoy*, which is in the 43d Page of Lintot's Edition.

I know a Poet (says he) whom out of Respect I will not name, who being too witty himself, could draw nothing but Wits in a certain Comedy of his; even his Fools were infected with the Disease of their Author. They overflow'd with smart Repartees, and were only distinguish'd from the intended Wits by being call'd Coxcomb's, tho' they did not deserve so scandalous a Name.

Thus far Mr. Dryden, who in this Passage doth certainly reflect upon Mr. Wycherley, and particularly upon his *Ptain-dealer*. But having reason to believe, that this is wrongfully objected to him, I shall vindicate him against Mr. Dryden, and all his Aberrors; and make no doubt but I shall make it appear, that by this rash Censure, he has shewn himself no more a capable Judge of Comedy, than just to that Friendship which he profest to have for Mr. Wycherley NOR MO that Regard which he ought to have had for his own Sentiments, and his own Sincerity. For, Sir, at this rate what becomes of the Encomium which he has given to you before your *Double-dealer*? What could prevail upon him, in his Verses before that Play, to tell you that you had

The Satire, Wit, and Strength of many  
Wycherley's Men.

What could she mean by commanding you  
for having the Wit of Mr. Wycherley? If that  
Wit is only a Disease, and serves to no pur-  
pose but to make you satisfy your Charac-  
ters? And why should he praise you for  
having Mr. Wycherley's Strength, when that  
Strength, according to him, must be Weak-  
ness itself? And am I to say what becomes  
of his Advice to Mr. Sacheverell, before a  
certain Play of his?

But if there could be such a thing as death, is it  
Copy and living Author, and one dead and the  
The Standard of the Drydenites Etheridge has  
For it, the Immortal Sprig of Wycherley's P-  
not Mr. Wycherley's wit which

I always thought till now, that there was  
a very wide difference between a Disease and  
Immorality, and am still inclined to believe  
that is copying the Wit of Mr. Wycherley. It  
was necessary to make another succeed, the  
Original could neither be absurd nor im-  
proper in Mr. Wycherley himself.

And, Sir, at this rate, what becomes of  
the Character which Mr. Dryden formerly  
gave Mr. Wycherley in his Preface to the  
<sup>State of Innocence</sup> where he declares the  
Author of the Plain-dealer to be the great-  
est Comick Poet of the Age, one whom he  
is proud to call his Friend, and one who by

the just and general Satire contain'd in that very Comedy, had oblig'd all virtuous Men, as well as all Lovers of Poetry.

This is the Substance of that Passage, which I cannot pretend to give verbatim, or because I have not seen the Play for several Years, but you have the Sense and Meaning faithfully. And now, Sir, of what Force can the Passage in the Preface to *Fresno* be against Mr. Wycherley, when 'tis plain that Mr. Dryden himself has three times contradicted it?

If the Business were to be decided by Authority, there would not be very great ones so wanting to justify Mr. Wycherley. As first, that of George Duke of Buckingham, who writ the *Rabearial*, who not only shew'd his Judgment by writing that celebrated Play; but shew'd the Esteem which he had for Mr. Wycherley, by the Benefits which he conferr'd on him, and by his frequent conversing with him.

Next follows John Earl of Rochester, whom if he was a true Judge of any sort of Poetry, it was certainly of Comedy. Now he in his w Imitation of the tenth Satire of the first Book O of *Horace*, told us that

*None have touch'd lately on true Comedy,  
But hasty Shadwell, and slow Wycherley.*

Anon he adds, *But Wycherley earnshardwate'en his airtys A He wants no judgment, and he spares no Pains.*

as sum of all this year past  
 is Mr. Shadwell, who could not but have  
 true Taste his Comedy, since he was so often  
 Writer before, tells this Audience in his  
 Prologue to *Bury Fair*, that he has  
 one very good reason why he has writ  
 -*The Plain-Dealer, and Sir Feopling you*  
*have seen, and justly have applauded too*  
 - shall he could bring the Authority of Persons  
 who are now living, he could bring indispon-  
 table ones, as my Lord Lansdowne's Mr.  
 Tyrer's, and your own, & many more  
 But if any one is presumptuous enough to  
 pretend, that all these are mistaken, while  
 he himself is all the right, if this called god by  
 him, that no Authorities, and not the greatest  
 care of any Force against Reason and Mat-  
 ter of Facts, and that this Reason and Mat-  
 ter of Fact, which have been hid from so  
 many discerning Judges, have been evident  
 to him alone; I shall endeavor to prove  
 two things both by Reason and Fact, con-  
 trary to the Objections of this presumptu-  
 ous Accuser, and then foreseid Gentleman  
 Mr. Dryden, and these are, first, that Mr.  
 Witherley's Coxcombs are really Coxcombs,  
 and by justly deserve that scandalous Name;  
 and secondly, that they are not only fairly  
 but neatly distinguish'd from the impudent  
 Witwates, or Foolish Countrymen  
 First then, Mr. Witherley's Coxcombs  
 are really Coxcombs. And these we must allow  
 serve that Fool, and Witwate for a friend  
 being Terms that are incompatible or con-  
 tradictory,

traidictory, that they are not so much as  
 Terms of Opposition, otheral being several  
 Reasons who are call'd Wits, and with by,  
 the Vigour and Fire of their Condditiones  
 are enabled sometimes to say what they call  
 smart and witty things, who have not one  
 grain of Judgment or Discernement to di-  
 stinguish Right from Wrong, or Truth from  
 Falshood; and that therefore the good IRE-  
 flection of *Rochefoucault* is veritally very justly  
 Outre quelque fois un foiz au contraire Espacio, mds  
 on ne l'est jamais avec du jugement. &c. &c.  
 may happen (sayeth) that a Man may be a  
 Fool who has Wits, but he never can be such  
 who has Judgment. The Vanity of those  
 whome they call Wits has made them pre-  
 tend that there is a full Opposition betwixt  
 Wits and Fools, But the only true and full  
 Opposition is betwixt them that is a Fool  
 and him whome is Misgib, griseclib ynam  
 evry word thow shold together sayl to shew  
 the Folly of those whom they call Wits from  
 the Conduct of their Lives, be cause I have  
 known several of them whose Actions have  
 not been entirely in their Power, but I have  
 known very few of them who have had the  
 use of Reason, I do not speake of Authors,  
 but of thos who have got the Reputation of  
 Wits, from thend livelies and sometymes  
 from the Looseness of their Conversation,  
 I have in the course of my Life convers'd  
 with a great Number of them, but I have  
 been acquainted with very few of them who  
 being Terms of Opposites is call'd  
 Iasidigora

could argue Logically; when I say Logically,  
 I do not mean Syllogistically or Pedantically,  
 but reasonably, closely and conclusively so  
 I desire in the next Place to observe; that  
 it is the Business of a Comick Poet to cor-  
 rect those Irregularities and Extravagancies  
 of Men's Tempers which make them uneasie  
 to themselves, and troublesome and vexati-  
 ous to one another, for that very Reason,  
 Witty Fools are very just Sub-  
 jects of Comedy, because they are more  
 troublesome and shocking in Conversation  
 to Men of Sense, than any other sort of  
 Fools whatsoever. Such a Fool with all his  
 smart Repartees as Mr. Dryden calls them,  
 his snip snap his hit for hit, and dash for  
 dash, is but too often impudent, impu-  
 dent, insolent, opinionated, noisie, fantasti-  
 cal, abusive, brutal, perfidious; which shew  
 the Solidity of that Reflection of Rochester  
 in the 18th. It may be noted  
 Sets by Incommodes qual servit quia est Vnde  
 T' Esprit. "There are no Fools so trou-  
 blesome as the Fools who have Wit."  
 Now such are Mr. Wycherley's Fools in  
 the Comedy of the Plain-dealer. My Lord  
 Plaiby, Major Oldfor, the Widow Black-  
 -friars, and Jerry, have each of them several  
 of these Qualities, and Nell has them all. He  
 is impudent, impudent, insolent, conceited,  
 noisie, fantastical, abusive, brutal, perfidious.  
 If I say nothing but what a brisk Coxcomb  
 may very well be suppos'd to say who will  
 venture

venire I at all, and who having a good Memory keeps the top Company in a Town over-run with Wits, as London was at the Time of the writing of that Comedy. What is said by him and the rest in the several Scenes in which they appear, is either trifling and superficial, or utterly and ridiculous, or appears to be a Repetition of what the Men of Sense in the Play have said before them; whereas what *Manly*, *Freeman* and *Eliza* say is always sensible, and is therefore always true.

As 'tis the Business of a Comick Poet to paint the Age in which he lives, which if he doth not paint, he doth nothing at all, Mr. *Wycherley* had by no means shewn himself so great a Master in Comedy, as he has done, if he had not brought these witty Fools upon the Stage, because in the Reign of King Charles the Second they in all Places abounded. The People whom they call'd Wits were to be had every where, nay were not to be avoided, any more than Toasters, Punsters, and Newmongers are now-a-days, but good Sense and Reason were to be found in as few Places then as they are in our Days. But now, Sir, I come to new that the Coxcombs in the Plain-dealer are not only fairly and justly, but vastly distinguish'd from those whom Mr. *Wycherley* design'd for sensible Characters. For *Manly*, *Freeman* and *Eliza* every where make it appear, that with their Wit they have Judgment, and consequently make great

great and important Observations, and have therefore a thousand times more Wit than the foresaid Coxcombs. For he who has Wit without Judgment is but a half Wit, and therefore has but imperfect Views, and makes but superficial Reflections; whereas he who has Judgment has home Views, and makes profound Reflections.

And therefore some have been of Opinion that Judgment doth not differ from Wit, unless it be in the Greatness and the Extent of the Light it affords us. *On s'est trompé lors qu'on a cru que l'Esprit et le Jugement étaient deux choses différentes.* (says the Duke of Rochefoucault, Reflection 122.) *Le diffé-  
ment n'est que la grandeur de la Lumière de  
l'Esprit cette Lumière pénétre le fonds des cha-  
ses; elle y remarque tout ce qu'il faut remar-  
quer & comprendre, qui semblent imper-  
ceptibles; ainsi il faut demeurer d'accord avec  
cet Etendue de la Lumière de l'Esprit qui  
produit tous les Effets qu'on attribue au Jugé-  
ment. That is, They are deceiv'd who be-  
lieve that Wit and Judgment are two diffe-  
rent things. Judgment is nothing but the  
Greatness of that Light which the Under-  
standing affords us. Tis a Light which pier-  
ces to the very Bottom of things, observing  
every thing in them which ought to be ob-  
serv'd, and perceiving every thing which  
was thought to be imperceptible. We ought  
then to conclude that 'tis the Extent of the  
Light which the Understanding affords us  
*qui donne à nos idées une étendue ou que**

[ 30 ] His Body has every  
 that produces all the Effects which are at  
 tributed to the Judgment.  
 All that we have advanc'd would be man-  
 ifest as the Day, if we were to go thro' the  
 principal Scenes in which the Characters of  
 either sort appear. I know not but I may per-  
 swade my self to do that one Day, provided  
 that what I have already laid has the good For-  
 tune to prove agreeable to you. In the mean-  
 while I cannot help making one Observation  
 upon the Scene in the second Act, where Na-  
 val intends to give an Account of the Guests,  
 at my Lady Autumn's Table, by which it will  
 appear how industriously Mr. Wycherley avoi-  
 ded the making his Dramatick Persons speak  
 out of their Characters. For Novel who is to  
 give the Account is always interrupted by O-  
 livia, that the Wit of that Scene may be in a  
 more proper Mouth than his; yet so quick are  
 the Returns, and so great is the Vivacity of  
 that admirable Scene, that it has dazzled and  
 deluded most of his Readers, and prevail'd  
 upon them to imagine, that Novel has a full  
 share in the Wit of it, tho' he has not so much  
 as a half quarter share in the very Dialogue  
 of it.

Thus, Sir, I have endeavour'd to defend the  
 Plain-dealer against the foreaid Accusation,  
 as far as my present Avocations would give  
 me leave. If it appears to you, who are so great  
 a Judge of these matters, that I am in the  
 right in what I have said, I make no doubt  
 but I have done an agreeable thing to you,  
 in

in doing Justice to the Merit of our deceased Friend, and setting it in a true Light. But if I happen to be mistaken, which yet I will not believe, till I hear from you, that I am so, I will make no Excuse for my self but what one whom you have the greatest Regard for has already made to my Hand.

*Vellem in amicitia sic erraremus, et isti  
Errori, virtus nomen posuisset honestum.*

Hor.

At the same time I am very far from believing that the *Plain-dealer* is a faultless Play, for where is the Play or the Poem that is without Fault? But since these People have not hit on the true Faults, it becomes his Friends to say nothing at all concerning them.

Aug. 1, 1721.

I am, Sir,

Tours, &c.

